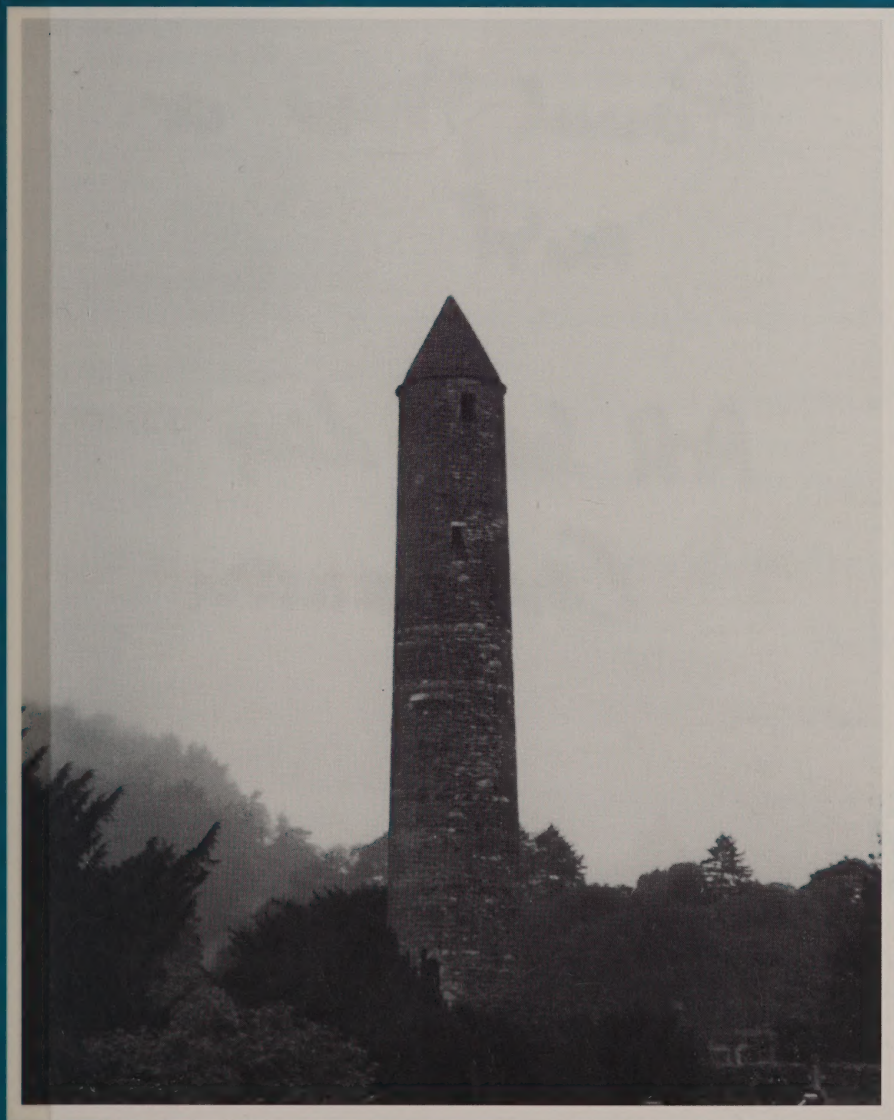


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SACRED JOURNEY



THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ APRIL 1998

SACRED JOURNEYTM

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is

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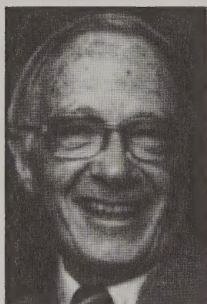
C O N T E N T S

Vol. 49, No. 2, April 1998

FROM THE PRESIDENT	2
FROM THE EDITOR	4
QUESTIONS & ANSWERS	
Belonging and Longing: An Interview with Danny Martin	6
PILGRIMAGE	
A Celtic Journey to Glendalough <i>Paul Walsh</i>	16
TEAMPALL NA mBAN	
The Woman's Church <i>Linda McKinnish Bridges</i>	25
A TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE	
Singing a Bread Song <i>Rose Tillemans</i>	27
PRAYERS	30
WAYS OF PRAYER	
Active Imagination in Prayer <i>Sheryl Seyfert</i>	33
ILLUMINATIONS	38
SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY	
The Practice of "Standing-With" <i>Joyce Rawlings-Davies</i>	39
POETRY	43
SPIRITUALITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE	
Hospitality <i>Arthur LeClair</i>	46

Cover photo by: Gregory Rick, the Round Tower, Glendalough, Ireland.

FROM THE PRESIDENT



In our last issue, I wrote briefly about a recent trip to Ireland with my wife and some thirty other spiritual seekers. We were on a pilgrimage to Glendalough, site of the sixth-century monastic city founded by the Celtic Saint Kevin. In the pages that follow we'll tell you more about our journey to that sacred settlement, and about the Celts and their vibrant vision of a world infused with the presence and glory of God.

The Celts envisioned God as the sacred source and essence of everything and everyone: birds and beasts and fish, sun, moon and stars, you and me. God, moreover, was not thought of as a remote, supernatural being "up there" somewhere, but rather as a close, understanding, and forgiving friend with whom we could have a relationship, and whose love and desires for us were demonstrated most clearly in his presence among us in the human form of Jesus.

As children of God, the Celts believed that their spiritual inheritance of original goodness, if acted on in their lives, was the certain path to lasting peace and happiness in the next world. They also believed, with their Druidic predecessors, that women should enjoy equal status with men and, contrary to the practice in the rest of Christendom, women frequently ruled great churches and monasteries in Ireland. Like their male counterparts, their assertion of individual freedom, their compassion for the poor, and their devotion to Jesus and

to Saint Brigid were at the heart of Celtic Christianity.

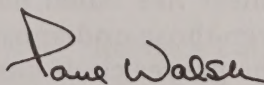
In the practice of their newfound religion, the ruggedly individualistic, rural, and tribal Celts disliked and distrusted hierarchy and centralized organization, and they showed this in two distinctive ways: by building monasteries—usually started by a hermit who built a simple hut for himself, but whose spirituality soon attracted others afire with the love of Christ—and by the practice of *perigrinatio*, or pilgrimage.

Saint Columbanus defined *perigrinatio* as a sacred journey—as “going into exile to seek the place of one’s resurrection.” In a richly rewarding new book, *The God We Never Knew*, best-selling author Marcus Borg writes, “Pilgrimage is a journeying toward God. It expresses the yearning of the heart to be in the presence of God; because during pilgrimage the Self is pointed toward its destination. It is a physical embodiment of inclining the heart toward God.”

Pilgrimage is an outer journey that reflects an inner quest for answers to questions such as: What is our purpose in life? What are we looking for? What do we really want? What is truly our heart’s deepest desire?

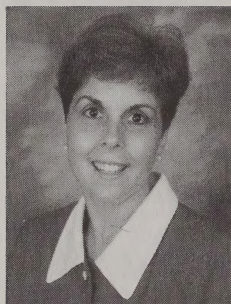
In the pages that follow, we hope you may find the beginnings of answers to such questions: Questions that were of ultimate importance to the ancient Celts, as they are to us today.

God between you and all harm,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Paul Walsh". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "P".

Paul Walsh

FROM THE EDITOR



Prayer is powerful. Believe me, I know. Last year, on the first of December, my five-year-old daughter, Megan, was diagnosed with leukemia. In four short hours we traveled from the pediatrician's office to the lab and eventually arrived at the children's oncological center. Today my weeks are oriented around daily medications, weekly chemotherapy, and regular blood counts.

Almost from the minute the diagnosis was delivered, people began to pray. The staff here at *SACRED JOURNEY* stopped the presses and added Megan's name to the list of prayer requests printed in the February issue. (Thanks to you who prayed for my child and the others in need even without knowing the circumstances.) Family and friends on both coasts contacted prayer groups and congregations of many kinds. The cards and wisdom began to pour in from people I have known for a lifetime and others I have yet to meet. The news of this spunky child's illness has fallen hard on many hearts and prompted even those undisposed to speak of prayer to offer some. The prayer circle surrounding Megan radiates outward like concentric ripples on a pond after a rock has shattered once-peaceful waters.

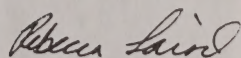
I know that these prayers have been heard and heeded. As Easter approaches I am a first-hand witness to a remarkable healing. Megan is in remission and has returned to kindergarten. More importantly, her laughter again rings daily through our home.

This experience verifies what I have long believed: We live in an interconnected universe. What happens to me impacts you. How I live, love, and pray impacts you. Your pain, care, and choices move me, too. The web that connects us may be unseen, but it is real and resilient.

The intrepid, early Celts shared this belief in an interconnected universe. In this issue Paul Walsh's interview with Danny Martin, his "Pilgrimage to Glendalough," and our poetry and prayer selections elaborate on the thin, permeable boundaries that separate this world and the other, then and now, my life and yours.

In *A Transforming Experience*, Rose Tillemans bakes bread marveling at the sacred ingredients of daily life while Joyce Rawlings-Davies learns that sometimes we are called to "stand-with" others when decisions bring chaos and pain into a spiritual community. Sheryl Seyfert explores the "hidden territory" of the imagination in *The Ways of Prayer*, while Arthur LeClair calls us to welcome "holy interruptions" as a natural part of *Spirituality in Everyday Life*. As for me, I am reaching out to you, and trust your hearts and hands are reaching back. I need your strength and offer mine to borrow. We are interconnected, you and I.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Rebecca Laird".

Rebecca Laird

Danny Martin



BELONGING AND LONGING

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Danny Martin

Danny Martin, a poet, preacher, singer, and theologian, is the founder and president of International Communities for the Renewal of the Earth (ICRE). Born in Belfast, Ireland, Danny was for years a missionary priest in Africa. He now lives with his wife in Cross River, New York. For information about ICRE, or Danny's beautiful video cassette, Celtic Spirituality, you can write or telephone him at ICRE, PO Box 194, Cross River, New York 10518 (914) 763-5790.

Paul Walsh: As you know, Danny, the name of our journal is *SACRED JOURNEY*, and I wonder if you'd tell us something of your own sacred journey—when it started and where it's going.

Danny Martin: Let me anyway begin with Belfast. That's where I was born and grew up and that part of Ireland was obviously a big part of me and a big part of the shaping of me, of my own journey. I think from very early on, I was as Celtic as they come in sensing the all-pervasive nature of the Spirit life.

And this wasn't something you were told. This was a presence that you felt?

Yes, as a little boy of seven or eight, I would go up over the mountains and lie in the heather to watch the lapwings and listen to the wind. So I had a deep sense

that spirituality was concerned with a much bigger world than saying prayers or being good. It had to do with the mystique of the world itself. And that's very Celtic; not only Celtic obviously, but it certainly is something I resonate with.

The other interesting part of my early life was the Catholic side. From about the age of nine or so I became an altar boy, but more than that, I made some sort of a promise to myself to go to mass every day, and I went to mass every day from that day on until I went into the seminary when I was eighteen. I mean, I wasn't terribly pious, and no one was telling me to go. In fact, nobody else was going. I was the only one. I had it in my mind that I would be—well, they would ask me what I would be when I grew up, and I would say "The Pope," and God knows what I meant by that.

But as a little boy, when I went to 7:30 a.m. mass at St. Theresa's Chapel, I got the same feeling, the same sense of another level of reality, that I had felt in the natural world. I was very at home. I felt a belonging--and that's a word that I associate with spirituality, an experience of belonging. The same thing I felt in my family. That was probably, when I think of it, the third piece of my spiritual life: a close family, an extended family with grandparents and so on. My father spoke intelligently to me. He taught me how to think, and my mother, equally bright, taught me with a great heart and a great sense of connectedness the cosmology that I came later to understand as Celtic. It is very much like quantum physics.

She had a real sense of participating in the ongoing creation of the cosmos—as a co-creator, you might say. She felt that everything you did was important—no matter what it was.

You were certainly blessed to have such wonderful and loving parents.

I was that. Then, when I was about thirteen, I had a truly mystical experience. Two uncles of mine would go down to the Trappist monastery about thirty miles away to unload their poor souls on these unfortunate monks, and one weekend they invited me along.

It was one of the long evenings of early summer in Ireland, and we arrived about eight o'clock. The monks had gone to bed, except for the guest master, who let us in. He ushered us up to a room with big, high ceilings in an old, neo-Georgian house. There were biscuits and milk waiting for us, and three uncomfortable beds in this big room. I went out onto a balcony and looked around and I remember seeing a monk. He had put the cows to bed and was coming to bed himself. They go to bed early, you know, the Trappists, and they get up at two or three in the morning. He was standing under a sycamore tree, and the evening sun was shining down on the tree, casting long shadows over the meadow that went down to the river, and then something happened that was probably my first powerful sense of the Spirit and the connectedness to that inner dimension I was just referring to. I will never forget what happened then: I became the monk and the tree and the field and the sun and it was almost like I could feel the fire flowing between us, and I never forgot it, and it became afterwards, as I thought about it, a sort of a measure, a benchmark of some sort, of truth or reality. It was after that I started hitchhiking down to the monastery and spending my school vacations there.

What appealed to you most about the monastic life?

Just about everything. I still love the traditions, the music, the Gregorian chant, the Psalms, the early hours of the morning, the candlelight. You've put yourself in a place where your eyes might open a crack to see. You can't make it happen, obviously, but you can create the space where maybe it might, so to speak. So I loved

those years. The monks would be in bed at seven o'clock in the winter, and I would be there studying for my exams and reading on my own. I think that helped shape me, too. Between the ages of thirteen and fifteen or sixteen I read most of Thomas Merton, and he impressed me deeply. I can now see why. When I look back, Merton was alive, he was human, and that also attracted my Celtic soul. I was not terribly pious, and I keep going back to the realization that spirituality and great moral rectitude were not necessarily the same thing. Merton captured that for me. *The Sign of Jonas* was the first of his books I read; it was his journal. He wrote about sitting up in the wee small hours and talking with friends about connectedness or a sense of another dimension of life, about the world of the Spirit.

So your own spirituality did not grow out of the traditional emphasis on guilt and sin?

No, I think that in life you start off as good rather than the other way around. If there is anything else, this challenges your basic goodness and you need to deal with that.

Are you saying that part of the spiritual journey is to bring yourself back into harmony?

Yes—we have to harmonize the so-called good and bad. There is a wonderful poem written about the turn of the century by James Stevens called *The Twins*. Did you ever hear it?

No, I don't know it.

Stevens wrote *The Crock of Gold*, that wonderful little classic. But in this one he says, "Good and bad are in my heart, but I cannot tell to you, for they never are apart, which is better of the two. I am this and I am the other and the devil is my brother. But my father, he is God and my mother is the sod, and I am safe enough,

you see, owing to my pedigree.” And then this wonderful last verse: “So I shelter love and hate like twin brothers in a nest, lest I find when it’s too late, that the other was the best.” I think it is so right on. I mean, how can we be sure when we say this is good, this is bad?

Indeed, how can we be so positive that we know the difference between good and bad?

Right. And what have we really learned from these fundamentals? I mean, if I were to be honest, I learn more out of the so-called bad mistakes, failure, you know. There is a certain wonderful sense—and I think it is very Celtic too—that the mistake or the failure or the suffering is your gateway through your vulnerability to the inner landscape. The more mature people that I have known came through the gateway of suffering.

I think of what you said in your video, *Celtic Spirituality*, about the thin veil that separates the two worlds and that if you want to know God you have to break through that veil. And you often need to be stretched to the limit to do that.

I think that’s true. In fact, our culture turns the veil into a thick wall where we don’t even need one another. Of course, to need one another would be to penetrate the veil, in a sense, to meet another dimension of yourself. But it’s so seldom that happens to most of us. Maybe around Christmas time, or maybe when you fall in love or you fall on your face. My understanding of the Celts, however, and I think this is true of my own journey—is that they deliberately sought the edge. Monasticism at its peak, on the island of saints and scholars, was on the edge of so-called civilization geographically. But more than that, the monks pushed out to the edge with their practices: their notion of martyrdom as

witness, for example. Some left everything to search for God, while others went into self-imposed exile.

Martyrdom sounds pretty extreme to me.

Perhaps. But it wasn't rooted in masochism or a belief that the body is bad. It was like yoga. It was like pushing ahead, breathing into the deeper places, the recesses of your own soul because something could be gleaned there, something could be mined. I think that whole Christian tradition came out of a Celtic psyche that went to the edge, that pushed as far as it could.

Does one go to the edge in the hope of meeting God?

In the hope of being touched by something . . . touched by a presence, touched by your own deepest truth. I don't know what it is yet. I can't quite find words for it, but it is something to do with the capacity or at least the willingness to live with the unknown, to find truth.

Life on the edge is like a stripping of yourself, to stand in the face of nothingness, of unknowing, and it seems to me that spirituality, what we call prayer, is that capacity to be present, to be really present, to not-knowing.

Does it scare you, to be in that place of not knowing?

Oh yes, it scares me. But sometimes it scares me less. You know, there are ways of being there. One is the obvious, the logical. But there is another way of being there and I think it is the way of prayer, the prayer of longing. It is whatever it is that is deepest in me, and whether it comes out in words or not, or in gesture, it doesn't really matter. It is belonging in a sense, that

maybe I can befriend the unknown.

I have tasted a bit of that: How you can be in that place which is the infinite space, the unknown, that should scare you to death? How can you manage to hold yourself there for a few seconds?

Prayer and meditation could be a form of training which would enable you to face the unknown, the infinite, without panicking.

I think that prayer is a participation, it is the spirit of life praying in you, and when you connect with that, your deepest longing connects with the longings of the Spirit in some way, the longings of the universe unfolding. You know, prayer can come out in a form of a deep longing or concern for a person or for a situation in the world, or for someone who has died, or for my own health. But it is a deeper longing than anything the ego wishes for.

The Celtic, pre-Christian way was like a journey of self-realization, integrating all the dimensions of life: thinking, intuition, feeling, and sensation. Life is about experiencing it all.

The feminine was a big part of that process of inclusion and integration, wasn't it?

For the ancient Celts, life is the result of the feminine creator force. The real power of life is the feminine power. The real gods are the female gods. What you had, it seems to me, was the marriage of the male and female aspects of life. The real power is in the feminine and the role of the masculine is to be a flexible, masculine principal that creates space for it.

Do you think feminine wisdom and creativity are being given more space, more of a role in the world today?

Well, they certainly are in Ireland, but the universe makes it up as it goes. It doesn't have a blueprint. It messes things around through ever new communions, relationships, breaking down this relationship and creating new configurations, and out of the mess that we call chaos, order comes for free. It kind of comes spontaneously, and I believe that what we call God is that process.

And I think the sacred journey is going into the unknown as consciously as possible. You feel that something very important is missing, and you begin to want to live life in a different way, not just a silly cycle of everyday that gives you a little bit of comfort and so-called happiness, but leads nowhere. You want something else, and the "something" costs, and you don't know what it costs.

What might it cost to find what you're looking for?

Well, you remember that T. S. Elliot, in one of his poems, wrote about "A condition of complete simplicity costing not less than everything." In that condition your soul must "Be still and wait without hope, for hope would be hope for the wrong thing. To wait without faith, for faith would be faith in the wrong thing. To wait without love, for love would be love of the wrong thing. But the faith and the hope and the love are all in the waiting. For us there is only the waiting. The rest is not our business." Look at that--wonderful! Holding those things together—to wait without hope. That seems contradictory. But it's very Celtic.

Do you feel those Celtic contradictions in your own soul?

Yes, what I want in my deepest place is—everything. And in order to experience everything, you have to become nothing. I mean, that's the ridiculous part of it. If

you have boundaries and limits, how can you experience everything? Recently, when I came very close to dying, an angel came and spoke to me, saying, "I'll take away the boundaries and the limitations and you'll be everything," and I said, "Hold on here. I'd like to enter this one a little more slowly if you don't mind." My sacred journey still has a while to go.

PILGRIMAGE

A Celtic Journey To Glendalough

Paul Walsh

At the end of October, 1997, a group of pilgrims from all over the country and from many faith traditions journeyed to Glendalough, Ireland. Our leaders were the Rev. Carole Crumley, an American Anglican priest and a founder of Shalem Institute, an ecumenical organization that focuses on the development of the spiritual life through contemplation and prayer, and the Rev. Marcus Losack, an Anglican priest in Ireland and Executive Director of Ceili De, an ecumenical organization specializing in Celtic spirituality.

The takeoff place for our pilgrimage to the ancient monastic sanctuary of Glendalough was the John F. Kennedy airport in New York—as densely packed and raucous a place as one could hope to escape from. Fortunately our co-leader, Carole Crumley, was on hand to identify her flock of pilgrims (by the small, bright green shamrock each of us wore on our coats) and shepherd us onto Aer Lingus flight 104 to Dublin.

* * * *

Safely landed after the smoothest of flights, we moved easily through the few immigration formalities, gathered our baggage, and met our other co-leader, Marcus Losack, an incomparably gifted guide to the holy ground that was to sustain and uplift us over the course

of the next magical week.

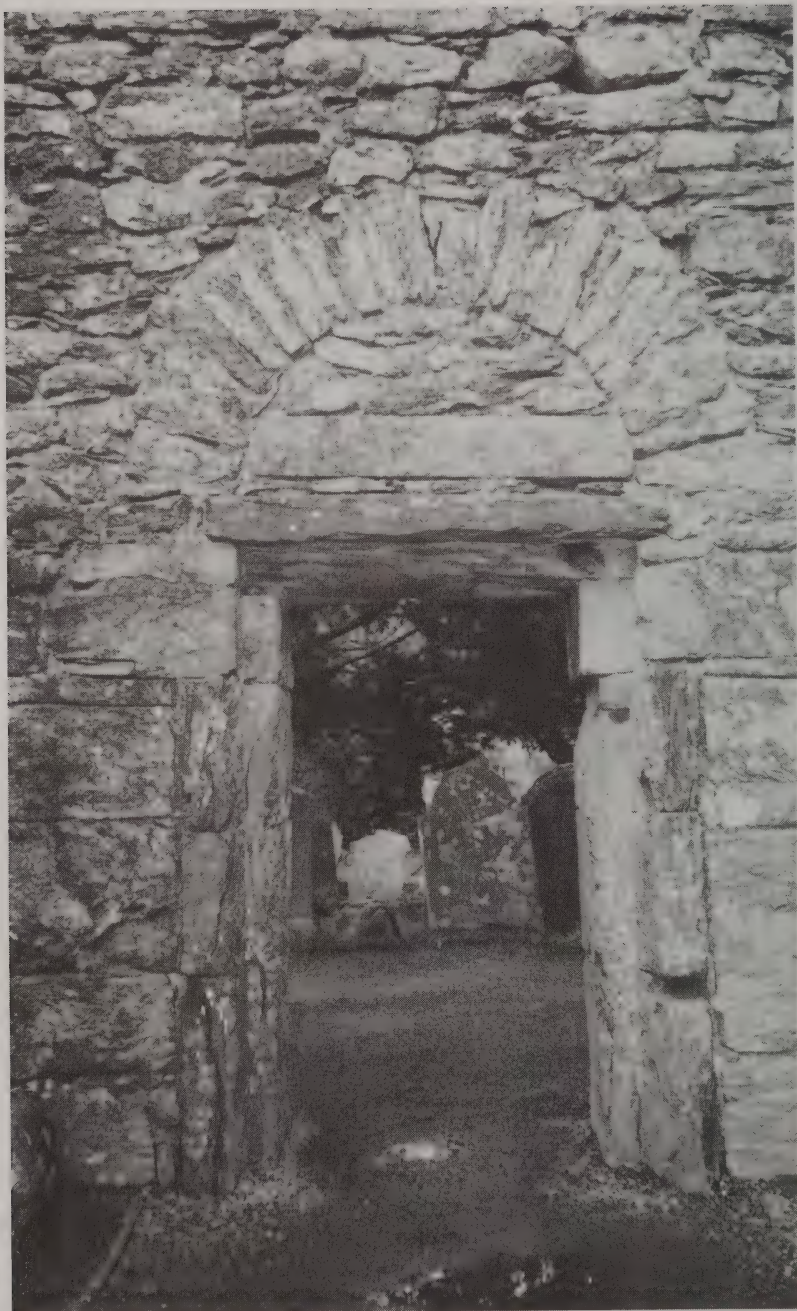
To ease us from the secular to the sacred, Marcus and Peter, our driver, gave us an informative and comprehensive commentary on the geography, history, culture, economics, and evolving renaissance of Dublin as our bus cruised by the ancient cathedrals and contemporary high-rises of that lovely city, drenched as it is in the violence and beauty of the Celtic passion for learning and freedom. We were on our way!

An hour and a half later the soaring round tower of Glendalough appeared on the horizon. That yearned-for sight signaled to countless weary pilgrims from centuries past that "the place of their resurrection" was at hand. Glendalough: ancient and holy place of pilgrimage; valley of mystery and magic!



Paul Walsh

The Round Tower at Glendalough, as seen by approaching pilgrims.



Inside the Cathedral Church, Glendalough

Equally encouraging, perhaps, to us weary travelers was the sight of the comfortably sprawling Glendalough Hotel, at home in its landscape, warm in its welcome. It's most appealing feature at that moment, however, was the bed on which this pilgrim dropped his weary body for a few hours of rest before registering for the Celtic Vision conference on Celtic Spirituality that would occupy us for the coming weekend.

The next morning, after meditation and prayers, we took our seats at the conference to celebrate one of the most magical dates in the Celtic calendar: *Samhain*. Situated astronomically halfway between Equinox (21 September) and the winter solstice (21 December), *Samhain*, on November 1, is the beginning of the dark half of the Celtic year, and was celebrated as New Year's Day in pre-Christian Ireland. Interestingly, Christianity celebrates this day, November 1, as All Saints Day. And of course, from childhood on, we thrill to the dark and sometimes dangerous excitements and rituals of Halloween.

The highlight of the morning—for all of us, I think—was the presentation by Father Sean O Duinn, a passionate and, literally, enchanting monk, scholar, and storyteller from Glenstall Abbey in County Limerick, who led us back into the Druidic mists of the Celtic past with his opening statement: "There are two population groups in Ireland 1) the ordinary human population on the surface of the land, and 2) their predecessors, the *Tuatha De Danaan* (tribe of the Goddess Dana) who lead their spiritual lives underground in sacred hollow hills or in megalithic tombs."

The *Tuatha* have control over the fertility of the land, and the human population is dependent on them for the growth of crops and the harvest. At *Samhain* the barriers between the two worlds collapse and the *Tuatha* come into this world to collect their dues for having given a good harvest. The doors of ancient Ireland are left unlocked for them on that night, and food and drink left



Ceili dancing

out for them. They go from door to door, and depending on how they are treated, they leave a blessing or a curse that will surely brighten or darken the future fortunes of the land. Considering the state of planet earth today, I suspect that the *Tuatha* have left more curses than blessings in recent decades.

That evening we turned to a different Celtic custom. Devoted as they were to the Divine Spirit and to the earth of Ireland, the Celts nevertheless loved few things in this world better than a great party, and we would have been poor pilgrims, indeed, had we not respected that tradition with a grand feast of our own. And so we did, with a full evening of *Ceili* dancing, haunting melodies by a gifted Irish harpist, storytelling by a master of the art, and a wild bout of Irish dancing on a come-all-ye basis.

The next day, the conference over, we met for morning prayers and meditation and, calling on God's strength to direct us and God's wisdom to guide us, we made our way through the mists and past the ancient gateway into Saint Kevin's monastic city.

Saint Kevin, the founder of the monastic city, was born somewhere in the middle of the sixth century in Ireland, a time and a place that was exuberantly converting to Christianity. He forsook a life of wealth and

ease to become a hermit and an ascetic, devoting his life to a single-minded search for God.

It is said, for example, that one day as Kevin prayed with his arms outstretched in the form of a cross, a black-bird flew through the window of the small hut, made a nest, and laid an egg in Kevin's hand. Kevin kept silence and, in his love for the bird, continued his prayers, not wanting to disturb her until her young was hatched.

It is also said that Kevin prayed for one hour every night in the freezing cold waters of the lower lake at Glendalough where, Losack tells us, a monster tried to distract and annoy him by curling itself around his body, biting and stinging him. Later, according to legend, Kevin took the monster to the Upper Lake and befriended him, rendering the monster harmless. What and who was this monster? We all have savage and scary monsters in the depths of our own psyches, and



Gregory Rick

The Upper Lake at Glendalough

Kevin's story encourages us to get to know and befriend them through whatever means seem most effective to us today, lest they sting and poison us.

Danny Martin, a former Irish Catholic priest and missionary, suggests, in an interview in this issue, that by means of his extreme asceticism Kevin was trying to stretch himself to the very limit of his strength, trying, like a mountain climber in training for the supreme climb of his life, to break through the limits of human strength and endurance into another world entirely. Unconditional giving of ourselves and giving up of everything else, he believed, is required if we are to join ourselves to the unknown that is God.

*The
feminine
essence of
God was
powerfully
present in
The Woman's
Church.*

We entered Kevin's monastic city through an ancient stone gateway that is the only one of its kind surviving in Ireland. As you step across this boundary you step into sacred space. You are walking on holy ground, and all your senses tell you so. You feel it in your body. Your eyes confirm it as you see, on your right, a crude cross carved into the stone wall. It is the sign of sanctuary. Of refuge. Beyond that point all were safe from pursuit by anything or anybody.

Once inside, the remains of the seven churches of Glendalough awaited us. Each breathed its own mystery and magic here in this "thin place" where the membrane between past and present, this world and the other world, is porous indeed. Of them all, the church that made the most powerful and lasting impression on many of us was surely *Teampall na mBan* (The Woman's Church).

This church was probably a separate enclosure specifically for the use of women, located within the greater sanctuary of the monastic city, according to Marcus Losack.



The Woman's Church.

In his descriptive and illuminating book, *Glendalough*, Losack tells us that "Feminine archetypes were well established in pre-Christian Celtic society, especially through the worship of the goddess and belief in the feminine essence of God, which was seen at the heart of creation." For the women in our group, the feminine essence of God was most powerfully present in The Woman's Church.

* * * *

As our pilgrimage drew to a close, we traveled to Kildare where Saint Brigid (known in pre-Christian times as the goddess of fertility) founded her famous monastery. Renowned for Brigid's generous hospitality to the poor and the sick, a refuge for men and women alike, her monastery became the largest settlement in

Ireland. After a visit with the Brigidine sisters, who are keeping alive the flame that was originally lit by Brigid, and whose mission is to spread the gospel of God's love for the earth and its renewal, we journeyed on to the High Cross at Moone.

As the bus bounced up the rutted road to the long-abandoned and roofless church, we passed a field of beautiful cows. Gazing solemnly and hopefully at us, they ran awkwardly alongside the bus and crowded to the rail fence along the road, watching as we disembarked and walked into the sacred space of the church.

We gathered in a circle and after a period of silent meditation and prayer—accompanied by the gentle but insistent mooing of the cows in their own version of the hallelujah chorus—the Reverend Carole Crumley offered the Eucharist. The presence of the Spirit was alive and powerful in and all around us as the men and women servers brought the bread and wine to each of us.

If one purpose of our pilgrimage was to experience the presence of God, surely those moments, in that place, in the company of our companions, human and animal, angelic and ancestral, affirmed the reality and ultimacy of the Divine.

For much of the story of Saint Kevin and his monastic city I am indebted to Marcus Losack and to Glendalough: A Celtic Pilgrimage, the very helpful and engaging book he wrote with Michael Rodgers, published by Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, PA. The photographs for this article were graciously provided by Gregory Rick and Paul Walsh.



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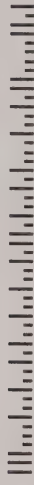
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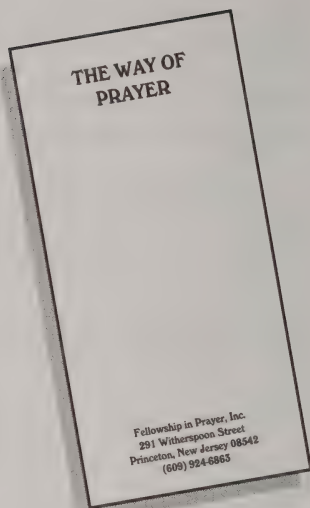
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* * * * *

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TEAMPALL NA mBAN

The Woman's Church



Linda McKinnish Bridges

Hear now the tale of the Doctor of the Church
Who made the pilgrimage as an inner search.

She traveled not knowing what she might find,
Only looking for traces of the feminine divine.
On a windy November afternoon
She found her Holy among a restored tomb
(that became for her a holy womb).
A woman's church made sacred by graves of children
and prayers to the Divine
Became the place for Divine Encounter and renewal
sublime.
Amid the obstacles of sheep, fence, and pasture
She began to find what she had come after.
There with women saints who had gone before
She traveled through an open door.
Circling the church not once but three times thirty and
more.

She circled, and circled, until at last
She saw the sun setting fast.
To the west she now faced,

*The Reverend Linda McKinnish Bridges is Professor of New Testament
at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Richmond, VA.*

Now it was time to turn and go into that place.
The place made holy by women saints of all time
Where now she could perhaps find the Sublime.

Standing under the threshold cross she found protection
as she entered in from the cold rejection.
Of all churches in places and other times
This one had survived in order that she could find
The power that she needed from within
To claim this God that had been hid
By years of the unholy declaration,
That women were only for decoration.
Not chosen by God for consecration
known throughout the church for all generations.

Now at this moment of threshold
She entered the woman's church of old
And found the blessings therein hitherto untold.
She fell down in front of the altar
Feeling the earth strong as Gibraltar
Prostrate with arms north and south, feet and head
east and west
She laid on the ground finding sweet rest.
God was alive and She was there
To meet all of Her daughters in despair
To those who needed respite from the cold
She was there to embrace women, young and old.
The Ancient Divine had been given many names
And in various cultures multiple frames.
But on that day, let it be known,
That Her name is God and She is still on the throne.

A TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE



Singing A Bread Song

Rose Tillemans

Today, I made bread. My morning eucharist began as I assembled the ingredients I would need. A Beethoven sonata on FM radio accompanied me as I brought to the table whole wheat and white flour, cracked wheat, yeast, milk, molasses, shortening, salt, and water. I reflected on the flour, ground from wheat that was once warmed by Brother Sun and nourished by Sister Rain. I stirred, kneaded, and then let the dough rise in a large pan. Then I sat down to wait until it was time to shape the loaves and place them in the pans.

I recalled a poem by Episcopalian priest, Alla Renee-Bozarth, in which she writes:

Bakerwoman God,
I am your living bread,
Strong, brown Bakerwoman God,
I am your low, soft, being-shaped loaf.

It seemed appropriate this morning to think of God as Bakerwoman. God, letting us take shape as we busily try to bring together the ingredients we find necessary

Rose Tillemans, a sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet, is coordinator of Peace House in Minneapolis, MN.

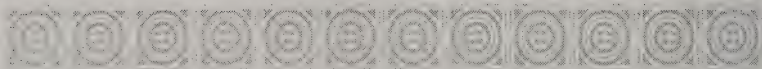


for each event in our day. It seems that God places within and around us what is essential for our shaping and then lets us rise. How encouraging to think of ourselves as “living bread, a being-shaped loaf.” Each of us, a unique loaf, broken sometimes, shared, consumed, always being re-kneaded and re-shaped. And how necessary are all the ingredients of our lives to becoming the special bread that each of us is. Is it any wonder that Jesus used bread on so many occasions—at the sacred meal to nourish, to assuage hunger, to help us see growth, to show us what rising is about.

When my bread was baked the sister I live with, Mary, and I sat down to eat it warm. We blessed it with the sharing of our friendship, and we marveled at how bread happens. Then Veronica, our homeless guest, came to the table and blessed the bread again with her presence. I brought part of the loaf to neighbors, and they blessed it with their thanks. Three blessings already. “One bread, one body,” I thought.

This is eucharist for me—to use God’s gifts, to create a unique bread from these gifts, to extend our loafed-beings to one another, to hold the bread-like moments in our hands with reverence, to pray in awe and humbleness because each of us is living bread, to sing gentle songs all day to our Bakerwoman God.

P R A Y E R S



Kindling the Fire

This morning, as I kindle the fire upon my hearth, I pray that the flame of God's love may burn in my heart, and the hearts of all I meet today.

I pray that no envy and malice, no hatred or fear, may smother the flame.

I pray that indifference and apathy, contempt and pride, may not pour like cold water on the fire.

Instead, may the spark of God's love light the love in my heart, that it may burn brightly through the day.

And may I warm those that are lonely, whose hearts are cold and lifeless, so that all may know the comfort of God's love.

Brigid's Blessing

Every day I pray to Saint Brigid that . . .

No fire, no flame shall burn me;
No lake, no sea shall drown me;

From Celtic Fire by Robert Van de Weyer. Copyright © 1990 by Robert Van de Weyer. Used by permission of Doubleday, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.

No sword, no spear shall wound me,
No king, no chief insult me.

All the birds shall sing for me;
All the cattle low for me;
All the insects buzz for me;
God's angels shall protect me.

Saint Patrick's Breastplate

I gird myself today with the might of heaven:
The rays of the sun,
The beams of the moon,
The glory of fire,
The speed of wind,
The depth of sea,
The stability of earth,
The hardness of rock.

I gird myself today with the power of God:
God's strength to comfort me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to lead me,
God's way to lie before me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's angels to save me
From the snares of the Devil,
From temptations to sin,
From all who wish me ill,
Both far and near,

Alone and with others.
May Christ guard me today
From poison and fire,
From drowning and wounding.
So my mission may bear
Fruit in abundance.
Christ behind and before me,
Christ beneath and above me,
Christ with me and in me,
Christ around and about me,
Christ on my left and my right,
Christ when I rise in the morning,
Christ when I lie down at night,
Christ in each heart that thinks of me,
Christ in each mouth that speaks of me,
Christ in each eye that sees me,
Christ in each ear that hears me.

I arise today
Through the power of the Trinity,
Through faith in the threeness,
Through trust in the oneness,
Of the Maker of earth,
And the Maker of heaven.

WAYS OF PRAYER

Active Imagination in Prayer

Sheryl Seyfert

Eleven years ago the structure and control with which I had maintained my orderly world began to disintegrate, not because of outside forces but because of something inside of me that began to stir.

Suddenly, the certainties of my life—who I was and what I wanted—were gone. At the peak of the chaos that became my life, an old friend reached out to me. He pointed me in a new direction.

Taking tentative steps, through therapy and a twelve-step program, I began to deal with issues I had long buried and denied. I also turned to God, something I hadn't done in a very long while.

Having only attended church at scattered intervals throughout my life, I allowed my psyche to find its own path to God, to speak in the language it knew best: images.

I began on my knees. As I shut my eyes the first time, the image of a forest came into view. I saw myself sitting on the bank of a small stream while butterflies



Sheryl Seyfert is a former newspaper reporter and columnist, magazine editor, and freelance writer. Sheryl is at work on her second novel.

fluttered around me. Though towering trees shut out all but narrow slivers of light, the image filled me with a sense of peace. It was as though I was in a womb-like place where nothing could harm me.

During the next few weeks, I realized I wasn't alone in the forest. God was with me. Sometimes we just sat together, watching the stream gently flow past us. Other times, I shared my fears and doubts while God listened quietly.

Always, when I opened my eyes, I felt a little more confident, a little more secure.

One morning, after nearly a year of this prayerful imagining, I found myself not in the forest but in a meadow of tall grasses and wildflowers. It was a bright,

*I allowed
my psyche
to speak in
the language
it knew
best:
images.*

open meadow where even when it snowed the flowers still blossomed. Again, God was with me.

Gradually, as the weeks turned into months, I became aware of a building in the distance. At first, the sight of it frightened me but then, slowly, with God at my side, I grew strong enough to venture near it.

What I discovered was a broken-down, ramshackle house. After many months of hovering just beyond the front porch, I gathered enough courage to climb the steps and look through the window. Inside, all was filth and decay: walls and beams fell in upon one another, debris littered the rotted floors, and cobwebs and dust coated the scarred furniture.

In time, with God, I gathered the courage to venture inside.

Together, God and I began to rebuild the house. Images of the back-breaking work filled my meditations. For weeks I saw myself raising beams, scrubbing, and painting; interspersed were visits to the meadow where I rested, renewing my strength and easing my fears.



When the house was finally restored, I saw that there were no walls, only a ceiling and a floor. The living room was the only room I could imagine at first—my desk and a welcoming sofa and a large, warming fireplace—but eventually there was a bedroom, all in white, where for nearly a year I lingered in a rocking chair, gazing past billowing curtains at tall pines and lilac bushes that always bloomed.

Finally, my imagination took me outside the house again to sit on a dock with God, watching boats motor up and down a busy river. During these meditations, I knew I was to board one of the boats—when I was ready. To move on.

By this time, nearly six years had passed since I'd begun allowing my imagination to lead me in this meditative prayer. Through therapy I had uncovered deep terrors from my childhood and learned, through my twelve-step program, new ways of dealing with the present. It was during my moments with God, however, that I had found the comfort and strength to tackle my demons; to face the broken-down house of my life and gradually rebuild it.

* * * *

Urban Holmes, an Episcopal priest, says in *Ministry and Imagination* that imagination is crucial in hearing God's word, especially during times of crisis. Images, he believes, can be the tool for understanding feelings we can't as yet articulate.

Carl Jung advocated the importance of active imagination, believing the psyche expresses experiences and feelings first in images and only later in conscious thought.

John Welch, O.Carm., in his book *Spiritual Pilgrims; Carl Jung and Teresa of Avila*, says the process of active imagination has the potential for assisting us in our spiritual life. "It is not that God is speaking directly

through these images . . . but through the images I am led to depths where my God-given life is attempting to grow. If we think of ourselves as a word spoken by God, then in imaging and active imagination we are talking about ways of more clearly hearing the word we are."

Fray Diego de Yepes, a friend of Teresa of Avila, wrote in a letter in 1588 that Teresa told him it was God who gave her the imagery for *The Interior Castle*. "God, who disposes all things in due form and order . . . showed her a most beautiful crystal globe, made in the shape of a castle, and containing seven mansions, in the seventh and innermost of which was the King of Glory . . . outside the palace limits everything was foul, dark and infested with toads, vipers, and other venomous creatures."

* * * *

There are many ways to leave our normal world and enter the realm of active imagination where God may comfort and guide us.

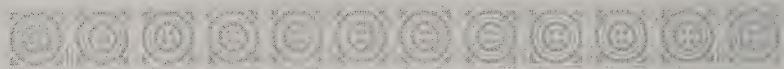
Dreams can be returned to while awake. We can take a scene from a biblical story and allow our imagination to create a role in which we can participate. We can draw and paint, or allow our imagination expression through dance.

Jung himself, during a difficult period of his life, took time each day to build a miniature village out of stones as he had as a child.

Perhaps that is the key: to turn to God as a child, letting God express Himself in that deep, hidden territory of our imaginations where we can be led on amazing journeys: pilgrimages where we flow past boundaries and find ourselves.

*Imagination
is crucial in
hearing
God's word,
especially
during times
of crisis.*

ILLUMINATIONS



Once, as they rested on a chase, a debate arose among the Fianna-Finn as to what was the finest music in the world.

'Tell us that,' said Fionn, turning to Oisín.

'The cuckoo calling from the tree that is highest in the hedge,' cried his merry son.

'A good sound,' said Fionn. 'And Oscar,' he asked, 'what is to your mind the finest of music?'

'The top of music is the ring of a spear on a shield,' cried the stout lad.

'It is a good sound,' said Fionn.

And the other champions told their delight: the bell of a stag across water, the baying of a tuneful pack heard in the distance, the song of a lark, the laughter of a gleeful girl, or the whisper of a moved one.

'They are good sounds all,' said Fionn.

'Tell us, chief,' one ventured, 'what do you think?'

'The music of what happens,' said great Fionn, 'that is the finest music in the world.'

James Stephens, "The Finest Music," Irish Fairy Stories

SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY

The Practice of "Standing-With"

Joyce Rawlings-Davies

For three-quarters of a year I served as a Friend in Residence at Woodbrooke College in Birmingham, England, a Quaker Study Center, and traditionally, a training center for ministry. Friends in Residence serve by invitation, giving of their talents by teaching, counseling, offering hospitality, or supporting the spiritual life of the community in other ways. I traveled to England knowing I had been called to teach term-time courses as well as offer a weekend course or two and help the staff, whenever needed, to maintain the life of the community. I had only an inkling about the profound and difficult metamorphosis the community was about to experience.



Early on in the Spring term the college's governing body made financial decisions which it believed would allow the college to continue to be a viable center of ministry and renewal well into the next century. Those decisions meant, in part, a restructuring of the staff, in-

Joyce Rawlings-Davies is an educator with 18 years of experience. She holds a Master's in Spirituality from Holy Names College in Oakland, CA. A certified Enneagram instructor and trained "Focusing" meditation leader, Joyce has facilitated workshops in the U.S. and in England. She is a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

cluding lay-offs, (redundancies), with all the concomitant sadness, disappointment, worry, grieving, pain, and anger which unwanted leaving often brings. Woodbrooke faced a splitting up of the "family," and those of us who weathered that unsettled period found that we, who were so often the caregivers to others, needed caregivers of our own. We often helped students resolve personal conflicts and were now looking for ways to settle our own. We prayed unceasingly for discernment, hope, and inspiration yet they often eluded us. We undertook a difficult task, but needed to nurture new life even as we mourned the passing of the old life.

One of the most difficult disciplines for me was in witnessing the many "truths" which emerged from the conflict, truths which often seemed mutually exclusive. There were individuals and groups who did not agree with the newly-made decisions; they sought the means to redress the larger issues as well as many smaller grievances. Honoring the many truths put forward while at the same time maintaining financial stability became a deeply distressing problem for the entire community. The ideal to be hoped for, I knew, was that all concerned were able to wait on the Spirit until a way opened to resolve conflict and to make all truths *inclusive*. This waiting on the Spirit typifies Friends' way of allowing time and prayerful consideration to show the group a way to resolve conflict with justice, compassion, and reconciliation. Putting egos aside and waiting in faith was exacting and painfully slow. Staying centered in the midst of tension became a challenge.

I found I was able to "DO" very little. What I was asked to do, spiritually, was to simply stand by or, as I came to call it, to "stand-with." This pattern was the opposite of my normal adult pattern of quick assessments of situations, decisive action, and *making things happen!* Swinging into action always relieved tension. Often the results were very satisfying, and many times I came away glowing with the thanks and praise of others.

It had taken many years and many tears to realize that my will and God's were not always one and the same. Many times my action, although giving a temporary "fix" to a problem, did not resolve a situation. Indeed, it often delayed or even precluded a better and longer-lasting solution. All of this wisdom I had gleaned concerning action and non-action was now being put to the test. At first I felt I was doing so *little* by simply being there with staff members who had been affected, with the students, with the institution as a whole. Often my efforts seemed ineffective; sometimes the "right words" just wouldn't come; occasionally, I felt as if my ministrations had made things worse. My prayer, which had started as, "Let me do some good," changed to, "Let me do no harm."

A constant interior battle was resisting the urge to lobby, to convince, to cajole, to come to closure, no matter what the cost. I simply "stood-with." I stood with people through uncertainty, questioning fear, confusion, shaken beliefs, broken plans, and rage. I stood with the institution as it labored to reshape itself, struggling with re-birthing pains. I stood with those heavy with responsibility for the decision-making, those struggling to accept the decisions, and those who embraced the changes with hope and purpose.

*Staying
centered
in the midst
of tension
became a
challenge.*

My "standing-with" witnessed miraculous happenings as well. These happenings were not the cavalry-to-the-rescue sorts of occurrences, but acts of faith and courage which, like spring flowers pushing through frozen earth, evidenced hope, strength, and renewal. These small but consistent words and deeds of kindness, graciousness, comfort, and understanding often came from the very people who were the most affected by the changes. This grace under pressure bore living witness to Quaker founder George Fox's instructions: "Be pat-

terns; be examples. Let your lives preach. Let your lights shine."

"Standing-with," for me, was definitely not a passive response to a complex situation, for even through my confusion and uncertainty, I came to know

its presence as a powerful force. Still, exactly how the practice of "standing-with" works remains a mystery. Perhaps the

Let your lives preach. focus of attention placed upon another,

Let your lights shine. without the hindrance of a personal agenda, becomes an ongoing prayer.

Friends speak of holding another "in the Light" during difficult times. In this same manner, "standing-with" may be an act of

prayer which allows for an open-ended outcome.

"Standing-with" might even be the unspoken gesture which says, "You are not alone. I am beside you. I cannot fix it, but I will witness what you experience. And I will uphold you in prayer, until you can take up the prayer yourself."

P O E T R Y

Saint Brigid's Poem

Anonymous

I would like to have the men of heaven
In my own house;
With vats of good cheer
Laid out for them.

I would like to have the three Marys,
Their fame is so great.
I would like people
From every corner of heaven.

I would like them to be cheerful
In their drinking,
I would like to have Jesus, too,
Here among them.

I would like a great lake of beer
For the King of Kings.
I would like to be watching heaven's family
Drinking it through all eternity.

The poem attributed to Saint Brigid is the work of an anonymous tenth-century poet and is reprinted from The Music of What Happens: Celtic Spirituality by John J. O'Riordain, CSSR, and published by St. Mary's Press.



April

W. T. Ranney

in April we had one warm day when the
temperature soared above 70, and i was
wearing old soft work clothes & work boots,
walking the streets, and i could feel the
warmth of the sun through my heavy shirt,
and the birds were singing, and i carried
the love of the saints in my heart as a
woman would carry a loaf of bread to her home.

No Promise

Corrine De Winter

The first face I loved
Had a voice that spoke
From leaves,
From horses,
From air.
The first face I loved
Was the face of God,
That white frequency
of mystery
Which penetrates all things.
It stays in the memory
Like a faded tattoo,
Blue & fuzzy.
Only in moments of reaching
Will it come back to you.

W. T. Ranney was born in Ithaca, NY. His poetry has appeared in many publications. He has spent extended time in India and practices meditation as taught by Sant Rajinder Singh. Corrine De Winter, an author and poet, lives in Springfield, MA.

SPIRITUALITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE



Hospitality

Arthur LeClair

Hospitality is a great secret of happiness that God shares with us. We all know from experience how warm it feels to receive hospitality from someone who cares, from someone who takes time for us. We also know from experience how blessed we feel when we share our hospitality with someone. Caring for someone, without judgement or wondering about returns, brings happiness to our souls.

God has a long history of hospitality, so it is something we should give attention to. As a matter of fact, one way to read the Bible is to see it as the record of God's hospitality to us. One of the great events in the Old Testament is when God feeds the Israelites with manna in the desert.

Usually, when we show hospitality to another, it comes down to food—sharing a meal, breaking bread together. Jesus feeds the throngs by multiplying the loaves, showing exquisite hospitality. And in the Eucharist, Jesus shares bread with all humankind until the end of time. The Eucharist is Jesus' never-ending hospitality to us. Perhaps we might even think of the church as a *hospital*, a place where people who are in need of care

Arthur LeClair directs The Spiritual Life Center and volunteers at Seton House, a hospice in downtown Denver, CO.

come. The church is the place where we come to receive and give hospitality, where we break bread and care for each other.

In the fifth century, St. Benedict wrote the original Rule for monasteries. In this Rule, Benedict says that a monk is to be known by his hospitality. Hospitality is an awesome thing and when it is true hospitality it always brings the presence of Christ whether or not we are aware of it.

Sometimes there is a breakdown of hospitality. This can occur within the church, within our families, within our nation and the world. Instead of hospitality we give and receive hostility and incivility. Yet Christ is always merciful and will rekindle the current of hospitality if we show goodwill and refuse to give in to despair.

Hospitality means that we interrupt the flow of our activities in order to give intentional time to another person: a phone call, a letter, a face-to-face conversation. Then we return to our schedules. These "holy interruptions," these moments when we deliberately share hospitality can bring Christ's peace into our hearts.

Hospitality means that we interrupt the flow of our activities to give intentional time to another person.

A few summers ago, I attended a small Episcopal church in Pennsylvania, and there were only eight people present at the service. The youngest (besides me) was probably over ninety years old! But the hospitality! I don't remember the sermon nor the hymns, but the warmth of Christ was present through the smiles and deliberate kindness of those present.

It happens frequently that those who are the closest to us are most often overlooked in our hospitality. On the domestic front, hospitality may take the form of folding laundry, preparing a special meal, or buying a scented candle for the living room. Whenever or how-

ever we make room in our lives to welcome another person, we extend hospitality. We hear so much today about domestic violence of all types—physical harm, verbal abuse, benign neglect, and the cold shoulder treatment. We all become diminished without hospitality in the home and society.

We live in such busy times that we have to take time to be hospitable. We need to practice hospitality intentionally. We need to give and receive hospitality so that our lives become more human and gracious.



*We are
members
one
of another
and everything
that
is given
to one
member
is given
for
the whole body.*

THOMAS MERTON

Lloyd Kleine Harvey has designed a set of note cards featuring Merton's wise words. For more information about Lloyd's work, write: 5370 Pershing Avenue #812, St. Louis, MO 63112.

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